

**CRASC Technical Committee Meeting Minutes
Turners Falls, Massachusetts
January 14, 2004**

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

Mr. Jay McMenemy called the meeting to order at 10:14 a.m. and adjourned at 2:33 p.m.

Mr. David MacDuffee, NMFS, was absent from the meeting. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MAFW) position on the Technical Committee remains vacant.

Mr. Steve Gephard motioned to approve the minutes from the previous meetings. Mr. Steve Roy seconded that motion. The Minutes from the April 8 and October 8, 2003 meeting were approved.

2 Fish Culture Subcommittee Update

Mr. Mickey Novak, Chair of the Subcommittee, provided the following updates:

Egg production:

Incomplete numbers were available. A final chart will be provided as soon as possible.

Brood stock transfers:

Due to the closure of the Whittemore Salmon Station in Barkhamsted, CT, 19 kelts were transferred to the North Attleboro NFH and 30 kelts were transferred to the Richard Cronin NSS. Additionally, 168 domestic brood stock were transferred to the Cronin facility (outdoor raceways).

The Richard Cronin NSS also transferred 28 kelts (sea runs in 2003) to the North Attleboro NFH for reconditioning.

The White River NFH provided 618 surplus domestic brood stock to the RIFW for an angling program there. The hatchery has provided 700 salmon to MAFW with another 1,300 available to MA for recreational fishing. The State of Connecticut has received 400 brood stock for stocking in the Naugatuck and Shetucket Rivers, and the State of Vermont has received 200 salmon, half for Lake Willoughby and half for lake Seymour.

All three of the recaptured, radio-tagged, sea-run Atlantic salmon were spawned. In each case, the eggs were of low quality and the number of eggs produced per female was reduced. These results may be because of the tags or problems resulting from manual spawning of tagged females.

The released sea-run salmon are tagged as part of a fish passage study on the Deerfield River. They are not released for spawning escapement. Generally, however, the number of recaptures is not so high, and there is evidence to indicate that tagged females have survived to spawn naturally and migrate back to the ocean.

As a consequence, it was agreed that there would be no change to the tagging protocols. If tagged fish are recaptured in the future, the Technical Committee shall be notified and the salmon will likely be held and spawned in the manner of Pacific salmon.

The MAFW was complimented for professionalism in this past spawning season at the Roger Reed State Fish Hatchery. Staff did an excellent job in the absence of the recently retired hatchery manager.

3. Congressional Initiative Update

Ms. Janice Rowan reported that Mr. Duncan McInnes, Mr. Jim Carroll and she are planning another trip to Washington, DC to meet with legislators in March. The ad hoc committee has identified a need for information on budget requirements in 2005.

Ms. Rowan asked the states if any have concerns or issues that would impact the transfer of funds from the USFWS to their agency? Such information is needed now as the agreements are drafted.

Mr. Gephard indicated that the State of Connecticut is prepared to support Plan A in the funding package. He also noted that the Connecticut River Salmon Association is likely to continue advocacy for the program among campaigning legislators.

The CRASC press release generated some news coverage including at least one article in the Springfield Sunday Republican (MA).

4. Scientific and Socio-Economic Review

Mr. Gephard initiated a discussion on the possibility of an internal or external program review. He proposed that the program should first address several key questions and then, once armed with those answers, fully assess the program feasibility through either an external or internal review.

The questions that should be addressed include but are not limited to the following:

1. Which fry or which streams are producing the smolts that generate adult salmon returns to the river?

2. How does stocking fry compare to stocking smolts in terms of adult returns? And, could we have a more effective smolt program today given available tools?
3. How many smolts are lost in the river prior to reaching Long Island Sound?
4. How many smolts are lost in Long island Sound prior to reaching the Atlantic Ocean?
5. What percentage of shad entering the river is lifted at Holyoke?
6. What is the population size of river herring in the river?
7. What is the population size of striped bass in the river?
8. What is the social and economic value of the migratory fisheries restoration program?

These questions have not been adequately addressed in the past primarily because of a lack of funding. Mr. Gephard proposed that the Commission makes it a priority to solicit the needed funds (\$1.0 M+) from NOAA-Fisheries, the USFWS Director's discretionary funds, and other sources. With funding, resolution to these questions could be expected within 3-5 years. The answers could then be used to guide management decisions for the program – options that range from continuing as is to curtailing the salmon program. Other considerations include the potential for increased workload and the fact that some of these questions will soon be answered by ongoing research.

Mr. Steve Rideout presented thoughts on how an external review might be managed. He suggested that it should be conducted in the context of the existing Strategic Plan since the plan addresses both expected adult returns (Appendix F) and the need for program assessment (Goal 5). He pointed out that while we have a great deal of data, some of the data is more robust, some less so. We are nonetheless at the front edge of answering many important questions. Mr. Rideout identified a number of questions for consideration:

1. What process and data are used to estimate the annual smolt production?
2. What portion of this production successfully emigrates from the Connecticut River?
3. What are the key components of a program assessment as described in Goal 5 of the strategic plan?
4. Can we develop a more robust model that identifies the factors affecting Connecticut River Atlantic salmon survival and provides a means to identify those factors having the greatest influence on survival rates?
5. Do we have a Connecticut River Atlantic salmon stock and, if not, can the development rate be accelerated with predictable results?

A review should consider data from the US Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee reports and include pertinent Connecticut River research results. A panel of scientific peers that is chaired by and includes members unaffiliated with the program should conduct the review. Mr. Rideout indicated that he would be willing to involve the lab but requested a written request with a clear charge from the CRASC.

The Technical Committee considered the two proposals and agreed that they meshed. Further, an internal assessment does not replace an external review but that the assessment should precede the review. It is also important for the Commission to consider what the Commission may do with the answers before the questions are asked. In the end, an assessment and a review are both necessary steps toward implementing the existing strategic plan.

The group was reminded that the Maine program was recently reviewed. Any action in this program may be better informed if taken in consideration of the Maine review results once they are released.

5. Fish Passage Subcommittee Update

Mr. Gabe Gries reported that the owner of the Fiske Mill dam, lowermost dam on the Ashuelot River, plans to surrender the license to FERC. Mr. Gries met with the owner, his lawyer and engineer, and Hinsdale, NH selectmen, to consider the options. The dam is in good condition. The town has an interest in owning the dam. If the dam is retained the state is looking for fish passage, an expense that the town is not embracing. Thus, the potential for removal is also under consideration.

Mr. Gries also pointed out that Entergy (Vermont Yankee) has proposed an increase in thermal discharge during winter (to add to the already proposed summer increase). This increase has the potential to impact migrating salmon and shad since proposed period is from October 15-May 15.

Mr. McMenemy indicated that Vermont would be requiring downstream passage and the option for upstream passage at the Weston Mill dam, the uppermost dam on the West River. Owners there plan to install a flour-grinding turbine.

Mr. Caleb Slater said that the local owners of the Russell project on the Westfield River have opted out of the licensing discussions with FERC. Their partners, however, own the Woronoco project and will likely pursue operation of the facility.

Mr. Bob Stira provided an update on the Holyoke project. The summer construction packages are out for bid. Plans for improving shad passage at Turners Falls will be out soon.

6. Shad Studies Update

Mr. Slater reported that the river had a fairly average run of shad in 2003. A total of 286,528 shad passed the Holyoke dam this past spring. This compares to 375,000 shad in 2002 and the five and ten-year averages of 276,600 shad and 266,900 shad, respectively.

The number of returning shad on the Westfield River was 1,774 shad. This is down from 2,762 shad in 2002. The five-year average there is 3,200 shad. He explained that in 2002, there was high water. In 2003, the fishway was staffed by volunteers and the number of hours operated was greatly reduced. The fishway at Turners Falls was monitored by video last year and, though the results are unavailable, it is assumed that passage was poor there.

Mr. Gephard noted that shad passage was also down at the Rainbow fishway.

Shad transfers are expected to continue as in past years this spring. However, fewer shad will be removed from the top of the Cabot ladder. Researchers are asked to collect shad at Holyoke instead.

7. Salmon Studies Update

Mr. Stira indicated that NGS, HG&E and GCC were on board for the 2004 smolt mark and recapture study. Funds from the USFWS may also be available. The draft 2003 report will be distributed shortly. Genetic sampling will be added to the protocol this year.

The CTDEP and VTFW will finalize the numbers and stocking dates for the sea-run and egg-bank fry that have traditionally been stocked in the Farmington River and the Williams River. A total of 228,000 fry is expected to be available for release.

Mr. McMenemy reported that the 2002 agency report on radio-tagged salmon is out for review. The 2003 report from Normandeau is expected shortly.

Mr. McMenemy requested index site data from each of the state partners.

The annual fry allocation meeting is scheduled for March 11, 2004 at the White River NFH in Bethel, VT.

8. Other Business

The Western Massachusetts Center for Sustainable Aquaculture has requested 200-5" for a feed trial. The request was approved if the fish are available at the White River NFH.

Mr. Gephard demonstrated the new NASCO database. It includes all Atlantic salmon rivers. The states agreed to complete the data for at least one river and to enter all the rivers that should be included in the database by the date of the US Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee meeting in February. Mr. Ed Baum is looking for constructive feedback on the existing database.

9. Next Technical Committee Meeting Date

Upcoming meeting dates are scheduled for March 23, 2004 and October 5, 2004.

Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Steve McCormick	USGS
Bob Stira	NEGS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Mickey Novak	USFWS
Gabe Gries	NHFG
Darren Desmarais	USFWS
Steve Roy	USFS
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Ken Brownell	USFWS
Aaron Martin	Volunteer
Duncan McInnes	NHFG
Mickey Novak	USFWS
Jim Ostrowski	Volunteer
Darleen Cutting	USFWS